

Ultimate Defence 02

Let's now look at the possible holdings you might have in the suit that you lead to start your defence, and the reasoning behind the choice of which card to lead.

a)A K 8 4 3; b)A K 8 3; c)A K 3; d)A 9 5 3; e)A 9 3; f)A 3

There is a well known saying: "God didn't deal you both the ace and king in a suit so you would lead some other suit". That is worth remembering, though there are always exceptions. But if you have the ace and king in a suit and decide to lead that suit, you should, as per our previous discussion, lead the HIGHER card, which is the ace. That is a simplification of course. Just looking at the given examples, you would lead the ace with each of the first three holdings. If you don't have the king to go with it, you are PROBABLY better off not to lead the suit at all. We'll talk about that later.

a)K Q 8 4 3; b)K Q 8 3; c)K Q 3; d)K 8 4 3; e)K 4 3; f)K 3; g)K J 10 3; h)K J 3

here we have more touching cards at the top but only the king and queen. In each case you should lead the KING. If you don't have the queen as well, don't lead the king but lead a LOW card. Lead your 'fourth highest' if you have no touching cards. If you have something like K 4 3 and decide to lead that suit, lead the lowest card. But with a DOUBLETON like K 3 you should lead the king, your higher card, from the doubleton. Such leads are pretty well kamikaze, so are not recommended unless you're foolhardy or desperate, or have a genuine reason. I would not recommend an opening lead from the suit with the last two holdings, but if you must lead from KJ103 you can choose whether to lead the three or jack. Any lead in such a suit is likely to either strike gold or the custard that your defence will turn to. The final example is definitely a holding that I would never lead from unless the evidence was overpowering.

a)Q J 8 3; b)Q J 3; c)Q J 10 3; d)Q 10 4 3; e)Q 4 3; f)Q 3

Same story here: lead the TOP card of touching honours and sequences. A sequence such as QJ103 is ideal for the lead of the queen as you have the jack and ten to back her up. With just QJx you should lead the queen. However with the first example, QJ83, you do have an option: leading the queen may work better, but then again leading the three, your fourth, may work out better as well. In the fourth example (e), you would certainly lead the three. Doubleton leads from Qx I would NOT recommend unless you are either desperate or foolhardy, but if you must, lead the queen.

a)J 10 9 3; b)J 10 5 3; c)J 9 5 3; d)J 10 3; e)J 5 3; f)J 3

The lead in a) is obvious. Also in d) you would lead your jack. But in b) you do have a choice: the jack or your fourth highest. I generally do not like to lead from a suit like c), e) or f).

Let me briefly explain the logic behind opening leads of touching high cards or fourth highest. The reasoning behind most opening leads is that you hope that you and partner will be able to attack the suit in such a way as to set up defensive tricks for your side. Thus when you lead the king from a KQ combination, you can be sure of setting up a trick for the queen. When you lead the queen from QJ you hope that partner will have the king or ace, and if neither, then the ten. At least it won't give a trick away. When you lead your 'fourth highest' you are hoping that partner has the high cards to complement your one or two honour cards, and after driving out declarer's high cards, you will have established tricks for the defence. But leading from suits like in e) and f) is asking for trouble since partner needs at least two high honours for the lead to assist in establishing defensive tricks.

While we are looking at the above examples, let me show you what can happen if you don't follow the logic of the opening lead and simply lead either your highest card or some indeterminate 'in between' card. Such leads are unhelpful and suicidal as a rule and great at compressing defensive tricks. I have included example c) in the mix because I saw the most atrocious example of trick compression just recently. Against a 1NT opening passed out, North led the JACK. Dummy came down with 10 4 2 and South held A K 8 7. Declarer had started with Q 6 doubleton! North had annihilated his jack and turned four tricks into two because declarer now had a sure fire stopper of the third round in the suit. Now let me turn to leads from poor suits. Leading the top card of sequences is best but there are times you may prefer to lead fourth highest nevertheless, or even your lowest, for example in c) below. When leading a doubleton, ALWAYS lead your higher card.

a)10 9 8 3; b)10 9 6 3; c)10 6 3; d)10 6; e)9 8 5 3; f)9 7 3; g)9 2; h)7 5 3; i)7 3

The very basic structure of your opening leads is to lead the HIGHER of TOUCHING cards, or your 'fourth highest' but from three small cards you also have the option of a "MUD" lead. That stands for Middle-Up-Down. Personally I would not choose such a suit to lead at all, or would lead the TOP card, but some people prefer "MUD". Thus, with f) they would lead the SEVEN and with h) they would lead the FIVE. When they next follow with the HIGHER card partner can diagnose the three card suit. However from some holdings e.g. 7 4 2, the middle card may be misread by partner as a lead from an honour card. An important consideration in making an opening lead is that you don't want partner to get the wrong idea as to what your intentions are. In fact that is a very important factor in good defence, as we will see later.